



## MANAGEMENT REPORT

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Author: Christina de Castell, Chief Librarian

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Meeting Date: September 25, 2019

TO: Library Board

FROM: Kurt Heinrich, Chair, Community Relations, Planning & Development Committee

**SUBJECT: Trans, Gender Diverse and Two-Spirit Inclusion Planning**

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### **SUMMARY**

This report discusses options for recommitting to the Trans, Gender Diverse and Two-Spirit Inclusion Strategy in the 2020-2023 VPL Operating Plan, and strengthening VPL's efforts, recognizing the impact of 2019 events on these communities.

### **PURPOSE**

This report is for decision.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

THAT the Board endorse a VPL goal to increase understanding of, and reduce discrimination against, trans, gender diverse and Two-Spirit people through recommitting to and strengthening the Trans, Gender Diverse and Two-Spirit Inclusion Strategy<sup>1</sup>, and directing staff to develop an ongoing action plan as part of the 2020-2023 Operating Plan.

### **COMMITTEE DISCUSSION**

The Community Relations, Planning & Development Committee members discussed the need to continue the efforts that VPL has made in this area, and to further strengthen the work by

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<sup>1</sup> Language is evolving for gender identity, and this VPL strategic initiative was formerly called the Trans, Gender Variant and Two-Spirit Initiative. It has been updated throughout this document to replace Gender Variant with Gender Diverse.

identifying it as a specific goal, and elevating it into the next strategic plan, as well as ensuring that efforts continue beyond any one initiative to become fully integrated in the Library's delivery of programs, services and spaces.

They identified that the Library will also need to consider other equity-seeking groups and ways to reduce discrimination in strategic planning for 2020-2023, and that these discussions will continue through the strategic plan process.

## **POLICY**

The Library Board has three existing statements that apply to trans, gender diverse and Two-Spirit inclusion: [Diversity and Inclusion](#), [Community Engagement](#) and [Customer Service](#). Also related is the [Human Rights and Harassment Policy](#).

## **STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS**

Vancouver Public Library has a long-standing commitment to inclusive and responsive library services. The Trans, Gender Diverse and Two-Spirit Inclusion Strategy is a strategic initiative for 2017-2019, aligned under Access & Equity > Patron Centred Experience > Reduce Access Barriers.

## **BACKGROUND**

VPL views public libraries as places where members of the public with diverse views can come together, learning, studying and working side-by-side and sharing community space. Respectful spaces and communication are important to us, and we seek to provide inclusive and welcoming spaces that are free from discrimination.

Statistics Canada has reported that hate crimes related to sexual orientation are the third most common after race and religion, and they are the most likely to be violent. While gender identity is not included in Statistics Canada's reports, organizations that support transgender and gender-diverse people in Vancouver have told us that hate speech, hate crimes, and inappropriate behaviour directed at people's gender identity is constant.

With this understanding of the prevalence of discrimination and harmful behaviour affecting transgender and gender diverse people, the VPL Board and staff have chosen to actively work to reduce discrimination against, and promote understanding, of transgender and gender diverse people in Vancouver.

VPL staff welcomed the recommendations in the report "[Trans\\*, Gender Variant and Two-Spirit Inclusion at the City of Vancouver](#)" received through City Council in 2016, and provided

a [report on planned actions by VPL](#) on February 22, 2017. The recommended activities encompassed five areas:

- Public spaces, facilities, and signage
- Programs and services
- Human resources
- Communications and data
- Community consultation and public partnerships

The VPL Board received an [update report](#) on January 24, 2018 outlining activities undertaken in 2017, and a subsequent [report at the January 23, 2019 board meeting](#), on activities in 2018.

Among the changes made at VPL between 2017 and 2019 were:

- Trans inclusive signs on gendered washrooms, and gender neutral signs on single washrooms;
- Training on gender identity for all management and supervisory staff, and more than 80 LGBTQ2+ allies among staff, as well as planning to implement gender identity training within the core Respectful Workplace training for all staff;
- Expanded and updated policies that include gender identity and expression;
- Eliminating gender from personal information collected when it is not necessary, and using gender-inclusive language when it is;
- Ability to use chosen names on library cards when this doesn't match legal name for the public, and policy ensuring staff can easily use chosen names within the organization;
- Pronoun education through email signatures that help start conversations;
- Promoting trans and gender-diverse authors through collections, displays and programs such as the 'Open Book' series;
- Programming for parents of trans and questioning children;

## **DISCUSSION**

In November 2018, VPL's Library Square Conference Centre staff received a room rental booking by Feminist Current for a ticketed event to be held January 10, 2019. Staff and the VPL Board received numerous expressions of concern and requests for VPL to cancel the room booking due to its impact on transgender and gender-diverse individuals. The VPL Board discussed the room rental and chose not to cancel the booking based on VPL's commitment to intellectual freedom and legal advice received, moving the event time to after the library closed to minimize disruption to services and impact on staff. The Board also noted that this event was not a library program organized by staff, and did not align with our principles of diversity and inclusion and respectful spaces and communication.

Staff and Board members understand that the decision to uphold the booking has damaged the relationships developed in 2017 and 2018 between the Library and transgender staff and patrons, as well as with community members and Library partners. Time and effort will be required to repair these relationships and to provide space for those affected to heal; staff will continue to discuss this and to share information with the Board on these efforts.

In the feedback received by the Library since November 2018, we have heard repeatedly about the discrimination and marginalization experienced by those who are transgender. We acknowledge the effort and trust demonstrated by those who reached out to us, who believed that if they shared their pain, the Library would take whatever steps necessary to prevent any event that could cause harm. In this instance, our core value of upholding freedom of expression conflicted with some community members' perception of inclusive and welcoming spaces at VPL. We recognize that even though some topics or speakers do not cross the legal line, they are perceived to be hateful and have contributed to escalating tensions. On social media and in emails we received, the commentary around the meeting room booking demonstrated how angry and threatening conversations can be when gender identity is the topic.

This situation has sparked important debate around the collective need for public institutions to address the definition of respectful spaces while upholding freedom of expression as defined by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We have worked diligently since 2016 to implement our Trans, Gender Diverse and Two-Spirit Inclusion Strategy, and remain committed to further action through the 2020 -2023 Operating Plan. We know there is still work to be done. Canada's norms are changing, and we have heard loud and clear from stakeholder groups on both sides about the importance of providing spaces where diverse opinions can be expressed. This is a complex issue, and we will be seeking guidance to further understand how we can work within Canadian and BC law to respect individual rights to freedom of expression without enabling an environment that promotes discrimination. While the library is following the current law, our sincere hope is that future legislation and legal decisions will guide us in this area to help to clarify what is acceptable to discuss in public institutions, and what is not.

Staff recommend that the Board endorse the following goal:

To increase understanding of, and reduce discrimination against, trans and gender diverse people through continuation of the Trans, Gender Diverse and Two-Spirit Inclusion Strategy

and direct staff to develop an action plan as part of the 2020-2023 Operating Plan, engaging with the community to seek input on additional activities and areas of emphasis.

An initial framework is presented to guide our consultation, which will take place starting in October 2019, and an action plan would be presented to the Board in May 2020.

### **Consultation**

Based on feedback from groups and individuals that have reached out to the Library over the past ten months, staff recommend the following activities to help inform development of the action plan:

- Continuing conversations with local LGBTQ2+ and trans organizations and supporters to learn about needs and concerns and discuss potential programs and services. These include Coalition Against Trans Antagonism; Pivot Legal Society; QMUNITY – BC’s Queer, Trans and Two-Spirit Resource Centre; Vancouver Dyke March and Festival Society; WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre; Vancouver Pride Society; WestCoast LEAF and PeerNet;
- Initiating new relationships with organizations working in this area;
- Focus groups by staff to gather information from individuals, in collaboration with supporting organizations;
- Town Hall with Board and staff participation to hear about experiences in Vancouver and suggestions for programs and services.

Through consultation, the Library will seek to continue the work that was undertaken from 2016-2018, learn from the past year, and build on this to further increase understanding of and reduce discrimination against trans and gender diverse people in Vancouver.

Our consultation and action plan will begin with an initial framework of three pillars, based on our experience with the 2017-2019 approach: public spaces, public programs and services, and human resources.

### **Pillar 1: Public Spaces**

Our activities will build on our prior work and look for new ideas from our community. From 2016-2018, VPL implemented “trans people welcome” washroom signage, created speaking points and training for staff to support conversations with the public when questions or conflict arise, and initiated planning for gender neutral washrooms in new library locations.

From 2020-2023, work in this area will include the following, with additional tactics sought through consultation:

- Seeking ways to provide safe space for transgender and gender diverse patrons, within the context of the Meeting Room and Facilities Use policy;
- Developing an approach to provide limited free community meeting space at Central Library;
- Detailed planning for gender neutral washrooms at Oakridge and Marpole branches.

## **Pillar 2: Public Programs & Services**

From 2016-2019, VPL developed and delivered programs that included trans, gender diverse, and Two-Spirit Vancouver residents as presenters, participants and attendees; provided programs to give members of the public an opportunity to broaden their understanding of gender identities and experience; created trans, gender diverse and Two-Spirit specific lists of library materials and community resources, and ensured purchasing and displays included books and materials by trans, gender diverse and Two-Spirit authors.

This an area of work with an ongoing focus in the VPL Programming & Learning department. Current activities underway include supporting a local group of transwomen and non-binary individuals by providing space for interactive fiction workshops and co-hosting a program on Project Management and holding power as a person of colour (POC); planning further public programs with trans and gender-diverse authors, and continuing discussions with existing partners for future program collaboration, including more non-Central Library locations. In addition to programming, staff are developing a section on law reform for the existing VPL Legal Information Guide for British Columbia and discussing how this could lead to future programs.

From 2020-2023, work in this area will include the following, with additional tactics sought through consultation:

- Identifying public programs that promote trans and gender diverse voices to increase understanding among members of the public, including for the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, and an LGBTQ2+ focused book club that will encourage dialogue.
- Consulting with stakeholders for other activities that would promote trans and gender diverse authors through the library's collections and services.

## **Pillar 3: Human Resources**

From 2016-2019, VPL staff formed the LGBTQ2+ Allies group to develop and support staff (now over 100 staff); established a gender neutral language policy guideline and reviewed all policies for compliance; delivered gender identity inclusion training for all directors, managers, supervisors and allies; and will launch online training for all staff as part of existing Respectful Workplace training. Staff are currently discussing resources and experiences around coming out, and will brainstorm about further activities for this action plan.

From 2020-2023, work in this area will include the following, with additional tactics sought through consultation:

- Seeking input from staff on the potential to create a staff advisory group to support trans inclusion efforts, and additional ways to support existing trans and gender diverse staff;
- Learning from the work and recommendations of CUPE 391, the Library staff Union;

- Exploring how to increase diversity among VPL staff.

#### **Pillar 4: Governance**

The Board approved action plan for 2016-2018 has been staff-led and emphasized public services and internal policies and procedures, under the direction of the Board.

Planning for 2020-2023 offers the opportunity to increase Board engagement in trans, gender-diverse and Two-Spirit inclusion as part of governance, which may include training, advisory roles, and participation in engagement. Opportunities will be identified and discussed with the Board during the consultation phase, building on ideas that trustees have previously shared.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

Staff will begin public consultation as described above for the Public Spaces and Public Programs and Services pillars, and seek input from the staff LGBTQ2+ Allies group to identify priorities for the Human Resources pillar. The Governance pillar will be referred to the Board for further discussion.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Staff training and public programming are normally funded through the operating budget. If specific programs or services arise that would require additional funding, staff will provide a report to the Board describing the planned activities and the funding requested.

#### **FINAL REMARKS**

From the outset of this initiative in 2016, VPL has been evolving both as a workplace and as a public service, and has actively worked to increase the understanding of the public and staff about trans, gender diverse and Two-Spirit experience. These efforts will continue as we seek to reduce discrimination and strive to be an inclusive and welcoming place for everyone in our community.